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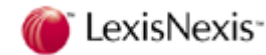
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# Legionnaires' kills man; Woman sickened; bacteria in Paterson senior housing

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## PATERSON

PATERSON - One man is dead of Legionnaires' disease and a woman is hospitalized, after an occurrence of the deadly bacteria in the Nathan Barnert Senior Housing Center, city officials said.

None of the other 117 residents in the 96-unit building shows symptoms of the disease, which is acquired by inhalation of drops of water or steam, according to the city's Division of Health.

The Paterson Housing Authority shut off the hot water Saturday, after preliminary results of tests from the state Department of Health lab in Trenton showed the Legionella bacteria in water from Nathan Barnert, said Irma Gorham, executive director of the authority.

Richard Guthrie Jr., 82, died of the disease Thursday at Barnert Hospital. A 76-year-old woman also contracted the disease and is in stable condition at Barnert, said Stephen Summers, spokesman for the Passaic County Department of Health. The woman's name was withheld because of privacy laws.

Officials have checked hospital records going back six months and have not seen any other cases of the disease in Paterson, Summers said.

Nathan Barnert residents say they have had their hot water shut off for three days and have each received 12 gallons of bottled water for drinking, washing, and bathing.

"I can't take a shower or a bath. It's terrible," said 62-year-old Marie Drakeford, who has lived in the building

for nine years.

She added, "The only water in this home is in the toilet."

City and state health inspectors began surveying residents to check for symptoms and to warn against using hot water on Thursday, said Joseph Suroweic, the city's health officer.

The Housing Authority contracted with P&K Microbiology Services in Cherry Hill to confirm the state's findings, Gorham said.

P&K analyzed 26 water samples from Nathan Barnert and found DNA from the bacteria, said Dianne Miskowski, client services manager for P&K.

Legionella is a common bacteria that can multiply to dangerous levels in warm, stagnant water, she said. The bacteria must be inhaled to infect people, making showers the most likely place of transmission, she said. Seniors, smokers, and people with suppressed immune systems are most vulnerable, she said.

On Monday, the Housing Authority hired DFH Environmental, a Paterson cleaning company, to sanitize the water pipes in the building, Gorham said.

She said the process should take several days and that the hot water will not be turned back on until DFH is finished.

She would not say how much the procedure cost. The Housing Authority, which owns the building, could be held legally liable, she said.

"I hope it doesn't break the bank, but we have to do this," she said.

DFH has never treated a building for Legionnaires' disease before, but the company did clean the pipes in the Nathan Barnert Senior Housing Center seven years ago, said David Hoffman, president of DFH Environmental.

He said he will flush the pipes with a chlorine-based solution.

The 44-year-old building has a 1,500-gallon hot water tank and 12 pipes that rise vertically from it and provide

water to all the apartments, Gorham said. Both of the residents who came down with the disease lived in apartments serviced by the same pipe, she said.

Though the bacteria appears confined to the single building, the Passaic Valley Water Commission began testing all the buildings in the area on Monday at the request of Mayor Jose "Joey" Torres.

A water tanker truck will be parked outside the building today to ensure residents have enough clean water, Torres said.

There are no municipal or state laws requiring periodic testing or sanitizing of plumbing in any buildings, according to Torres, the state Department of Health, and the state Department of Community Affairs.

Testing is mandated each week in the month after the bacteria is discovered and for three months thereafter, said Eddy Bresnitz, epidemiologist for the state Department of Health.

Eugene Miller, president of the residents council at Nathan Barnert, said that most residents are worried. "Who wouldn't be concerned about something that nasty?" he said.

He added that Guthrie was about to become the vice president of the residents council.

Margarita Adorno, 73, said she has been traveling to her sister's house nearby to shower.

"Six gallons of water is not enough., I have to cook and do dishes," she said.

Desmond Forbes, 73, was moving out of the building when he learned the news of the disease.

"I said, 'Thank you, Jesus, for finding me a new place to live,' and because of that, I'm moving out of here faster," he said.

About Legionnaires' disease

Legionnaires' disease is a relatively rare bacterial infection that can sometimes seem like pneumonia and is usually cured with antibiotics.

Symptoms, which take two to 10 days to appear, include fever, chills, and coughing, and sometimes include

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muscle pain, headaches, and diarrhea. Some people infected with the bacteria can experience no symptoms at all. Five to 30 percent of cases are fatal.

The disease is contracted by breathing in the mist of water contaminated with Legionella pneumophila, a bacterium that thrives in warm, stagnant water, like that found in hot water tanks, cooling towers of large air conditioning systems, hot tubs, water faucets, showers, some ponds, and soil. It is not passed from person to person.

Smokers, heavy drinkers, those who have chronic lung diseases, and those with immune systems weakened by another disease, such as AIDS, or by chemotherapy, are more likely to fall ill. Middle-aged and older people are also at higher risk.

Legionnaires' disease was first detected in 1976, when American Legionnaires attending a conference in Philadelphia contracted the illness. Thirty-four of those infected later died.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention say 8,000 to 18,000 people contract Legionnaires' disease in the United States each year.

Sixty-five people in New Jersey were diagnosed with Legionnaires' disease last year. Thirty-one people have been diagnosed so far this year. Two people in Passaic County and two in Bergen County have been reported as contracting the illness this year.

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